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USAID and Sustainable Tourism: Meeting Development Objectives



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Since 2000, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has initiated or completed over 100 projects in 72 countries that utilize sustainable tourism as a platform for achieving broad agency development objectives. USAID's tourism activities have helped to promote economic growth and poverty reduction, competitiveness, environmental conservation, gender mainstreaming, education, and good governance. As an example, tourism is viewed by the Agency's Missions and their host countries as a labor-intensive export industry due to its foreign exchange-earning capacity – hence its value as an economic growth tool.

Tourism is also a valuable tool for environmental conservation. Because of its income-generating potential and other benefits, tourism encourages governments and communities to value and protect the resource base on which tourism often depends. Beautiful, well-run national parks, clean beaches and thriving coral reefs, and healthy and abundant wildlife populations draw tourists from around the world.

In addition, in line with the Millennium Development Goals, USAID is increasingly incorporating tourism into its development activities to:

- Eradicate poverty through enterprise development and sharing of profits within communities;
- Address education through the training and capacity-building that accompany tourism development;
- Promote gender equality by involving women, providing them with access to credit and training; and supporting women-owned businesses;
- Combat HIV/AIDS through education within the tourism industry;
- Ensure environmental sustainability and the vitality of the resource base on which much tourism depends; and
- Develop global partnerships by collaborating with developing countries, other donor agencies and private partners in development activities.

In the past, USAID's tourism projects have seldom been stand-alone activities, but rather have been a component of larger projects – usually focused on economic development or on environmental conservation. Now USAID is increasingly looking toward holistic tourism development activities, from



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broad policy work down to on-the-ground product development, as larger cross-sectoral projects that are complete in themselves.

Looking at sustainable tourism as a system allows USAID to see where there are gaps, identify the most helpful and effective entry points, and understand more clearly how the various components of tourism interact. For example, the tourism industry might need to consider housing for employees if the surrounding community cannot supply the workforce needed and people must travel to work from other communities. A government might need to revise legislation to authorize certain conservation finance options so concessions and entry fees can fund park operations. Farmers in a tourism community might need help with crop diversification to provide local fruits and vegetables to tourist lodging and restaurants.

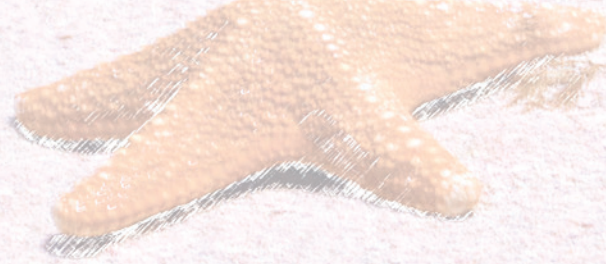
Approaching tourism as a system also provides the opportunity for USAID to work cross-sectorally, approaching tourism development as an inter-disciplinary issue, which allows the Agency to pool scarce resources, be more effective, and not miss addressing key start-up requirements.

Some outstanding recent examples of USAID Tourism activity:

- Jamaica's EAST (Environmental Audits for Sustainable Tourism) Project focusing on clean production, environmental management systems and competitiveness in hotels.
- Bulgaria's National and Regional Ecotourism Strategy Project for economic growth and community poverty reduction making it worthwhile for communities to support national parks.
- Egypt's Red Sea Project for biodiversity conservation and economic growth.
- Namibia's LIFE (Living in a Finite Environment) Project, a wonderful example of using tourism to help achieve the broader goals of sustainable natural resources management and devolution of rights over wildlife to local communities.

USAID and our development partners are well-positioned to provide countries with:

- tourism-related expertise,
- training and capacity-building, and
- financing for eligible countries through generation of local currency through debt swap programs or development credit authority.





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USAID can also help countries provide a foundation for tourism development by helping them to:

- Establish and implement policies that conserve and enhance natural resources as a priority base for tourism attractions and growth that improves the livelihoods of all citizens.
- Form cross-sectoral and inter-ministry working groups so several ministries (such as commerce, transportation, environment, education) are involved with and provide support to tourism development.
- Improve a country's "Doing Business Score" (see the World Bank's "Doing Business 2005" report). Governments can identify, after reviewing their country's "Doing Business" indicators, where they lag behind and will know what reforms are needed to encourage any business (including tourism) to develop.
- Work toward providing community access to resources and to guarantee resource rights – such as land tenure, forest management, and coastal fishing rights, with preference for employment and other income-enhancing opportunities related to tourism.
- Coordinate donor activities to enhance synergies and cooperation. Many countries convene donor councils.
- Commit national budget resources to partnerships, conservation, and investment support through infrastructure development.

Host country governments can work with USAID:

- In a bi-lateral, government-to-government capacity to inform Missions and Regional Offices of their needs and priorities, and their interest in tourism development.
- Eligible countries can work with the Tropical Forest Conservation Act and the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative to relieve certain official debt owed the US Government while at the same time generating funds in local currency to support tropical forest conservation and other environmental conservation activities.
- Governments can assist with forming alliances and partnerships with the private sector, other donors, and NGO's to propose Global Development Alliance projects for funding.

Additional support to USAID program managers and partnering governments and agencies both at home and in the field includes a networking website housing a virtual library of tourism planning and implementation documents, a searchable projects database, project profiles, training and other tools, and lessons learned.

For Further Information:

<http://www.nric.net/tourism.htm>
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